



“Stewardship in National Defense” National Defense University Remarks

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General Norty Schwartz

Thank you, Lt. Col. Bryan Duffy for that introduction. And thank you to Lt. Gen. Frances Wilson and the distinguished NDU faculty for allowing me to join you today. It is truly a pleasure to be here with our Nation’s finest as you study the art and science of National Defense.

I use both of the words “art” and “science” in recognition of the importance of the work you are doing here. For the business of National Defense is a science in the sense that there are principles of successful strategy and efficient application of our Nation’s resources for defense, but the business is also an art in the sense that history has shown success in defense often involves a stroke of military genius. And the more time we spend in thoughtful dialogue between Joint and Coalition classmates and faculty, the better we become as practitioners as we sharpen the blade of our strategic vision.

The future of our Nation’s defense depends upon the balance of these ideals, for pure scholarly intellect cannot hope to win alone in tomorrow’s battle space. Nor can mindless exertion of even the most exquisite of violent means hope to achieve meaningful strategic results. In fact, our national defense hinges upon the fulcrum of balance in our strategic thinking, in concert with the other instruments of power, featuring proper proportions both of hard and soft power.

This balanced blend of orchestrated ways and means must meet the challenges of a world ever increasing in complexity and many of you in this room will be asked to deliver thoughtful strategies to achieve that blend. You could not be engaged in a more noble pursuit. It is good to know that we have here the perfect representation of warrior-scholars representing the Joint force, our coalition partners, and our interagency teammates. I thank you for all you do to serve our Nation and the security of the freedom-loving people of the world.

THE FOUNDATION OF STRATEGY

I want to speak to you today about something I think is vital to your pursuits. Recent events throughout the tapestry of our democratic republic bring this topic to mind, but more importantly, recent events within our own military profession focus our attention on it. I am



speaking of that which serves as the foundation of every important aspect of military service in a free society -- the fundamental role of stewardship in National Defense.

For in this society, our citizens place a special trust in the profession of arms and for our part, that trust is earned and kept through ceaseless devotion to faithful stewardship of national resources. I submit that stewardship is the necessary precondition for all other military activities, whether tactical, operational or strategic and as we study in discourse together, we will do well to reflect upon this foundational notion. I suggest so, because I believe that we may be forgiven, occasionally, for failures in a variety of contexts in combat, but we should not accept, nor will the American people tolerate, imperfections in our sense of faithful stewardship.

In this sense stewardship forms the foundation of strategy in the profession of arms, because victory and defeat are empty without the trust of the people and they are meaningless without the trust we share together as members of our Joint team.

THE MEANING OF STEWARDSHIP

But what do I mean when I speak of stewardship? If it truly serves as a foundational principle then we should be careful to define it. Merriam-Webster tells us stewardship is “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.”¹ This sounds simple enough, but I think there are logical extensions of that simple notion that have deeply important implications for us.

In his book, “Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest,” Peter Block well-describes the implications as he carefully defines the word.² He argues that “Stewardship is to hold something in trust for another...the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather than in control, of those around us.”³ He elaborates further in a section with a title I particularly enjoy called “Trading Your Kingdom for a Horse.” That is a compelling notion with military relevance, don’t you think?

Mr. Block says that “Stewardship is the set of principles...concerned with creating a way of governing ourselves that creates a strong sense of ownership and responsibility at the bottom

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship>, accessed 14 Nov 2008

² Peter Block, “Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self Interest” Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1993

³ Block, “Stewardship,” p. XX



of the organization.”⁴ This concept forms the introductory notion of military service to which I refer. It is nothing new, nothing too complicated, nothing particularly novel to our comprehension and yet it seems to elude us in many critical ways, sometimes at monumentally critical moments for some in uniform. To paraphrase Clausewitz, everything in stewardship is simple, yet even simple service is difficult. In other words, just because the concept of stewardship is simple, it does not mean stewardship is easy. This elegance bears the hallmark of excellence. It demands selfless effort and a continual mindset focused upon others’ needs and the needs of the organization. But why is stewardship so foundational to military service in particular?

The answer is based on the reality that a free society entrusts the military with the means for terrible destruction and ways designed to exert control by force. Our Constitution’s founders understood this at the creation of our government and Americans instinctively understand those implications today, especially when we now possess the means of nuclear weapons and the power for such irrevocable and unfathomable destruction.

The people must know without a doubt that their military is not only on their side and acting in their best interest under civilian control, but also that those in uniform accept the deepest responsibility for securing those means until the need arises and that we are accountable for all outcomes of our performance both large and small. There is no greater imperative for devoted stewardship than in the profession of arms.

With all due respect to General McArthur, I offer that there is no substitute for stewardship in our profession. While it is certainly true that in war there is no substitute for victory, in both war and peace there is no substitute for that which earns and keeps the most precious trust of the American people.⁵ It stands as the foundation of our service, and as such, no single idea could have more meaning for those of us who wear the uniform. Though our stewardship has a necessary benefit with the trust of the people, it also has a profound impact on the question of victory.

I suggest that the better stewards we are in the profession of arms, the better prepared we will be to secure the victory and the less frequently we will be called upon to prove our preparedness. This is true because the effects of stewardship also serve to deter and dissuade those who would challenge us and serve to assure those who serve alongside us. So the better

⁴ Block, “Stewardship,” p. 5

⁵ Douglas McArthur. “There is no substitute for victory.” Letter to Representative Joseph W. Martin, Jr., 20 Mar 1951; read to Congress by Martin on 5 Apr 1951.



stewards we are with the military instrument, the more secure our Nation will be. We must not lose sight of this at any level of our service. No outcome is too small, no deed is insignificant, and no one who serves can escape these implications, no matter the task.

STEWARDSHIP IN OUR SERVICE

What should we say, then, about stewardship? Can we look at ourselves in an introspective fashion, find no faults, and move on confidently? Can individual organizations contently assess themselves as satisfactory in their stewardship? Can one portion of a military Service compare itself to another in a kind of “stewardship check” in satisfaction? Or can one Service enjoy the fruits of stewardship while another fails to deliver on the promise? To me, the answer is “no.”

Everything that chips away at any part of military credibility chips away at the whole. It doesn’t matter what uniform you wear, or what occupational specialty you hold. We all serve together collectively. We all share a singular reputation for serving the needs of the people. It matters little whether we speak of any number of mistakes and misdeeds that have arisen to national attention. The fact is that we all suffer a loss of trust in the collective profession of arms.

Each and every one of us at all levels must commit ourselves to a personal spirit of stewardship in taking care of day-to-day duties, in taking care of our wounded warriors and their families, in taking care of our organizations, units and commands and in caring for our most vital and limited resources: our people, our ideas and our equipment

Our calling is to serve the needs of those around us and the needs of our organizations before we do the first thing to serve ourselves. We must never forget this. As for the Air Force, we are fully committed to reinvigorating our nuclear enterprise in order to regain and keep that precious trust. We are working diligently to show ourselves as trustworthy partners in winning today’s fight and we are deeply devoted to developing and taking care of our Airmen and their families, especially our wounded warriors. We do this as we strive for acquisition excellence as stewards of equipment and machines in need of modernization, all in the context of prolonged combat familiar to all of the Services.

You have my word on the Air Force commitment to stewardship of all these and more, because our Nation trusts us to be good stewards of a wide range of capabilities in the shared



domains of air, space and cyberspace, providing Global Vigilance, Reach and Power for America.

As members of the Joint and interagency team, our Nation trusts us all to be good stewards in our respective areas of expertise. We all understand these diversities and complexities, but we must remain focused on that precious notion of stewardship as we go forward. This is particularly true for you and me, those who now occupy, or soon will, high positions of trust.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps Peter Block summed up best the position of the American people when he wrote the following words, “The fire and intensity of self-interest seem to burn all around us. We search, so often in vain, to find leaders we can have faith in. Our doubts are not about our leaders’ talents, but about their trustworthiness.”⁶ The American people struggle today with this crisis of confidence--from the integrity of our financial institutions, to issues in public education, to the viability of our health care system and even with issues underlying the very trust we expect in our governing processes. The issue of trustworthiness could not be timelier or more critical.

It is up to us in uniform to take our portion of these concerns off America’s consciousness. The Nation has enough on its mind without worrying about the integrity of those who serve in our common defense. We can do just that as we focus on being good stewards of the Nation’s sons and daughters and its treasure. We can do just that with good stewardship in national defense. The way ahead for us is simple, but it won’t be easy because, as Block wrote, it is a choice we must make each and every day. He says, “ultimately the choice we make is between service and self-interest.”

It makes me so proud to be here among so many who have chosen service. I challenge each one of you to consider the broader implications of stewardship and to prove the benefits in everything you do. We must deliver on the promise of stewardship for America and our partners.

I leave you with a final thought from Peter Block’s offering on stewardship. He states that, “it is not so much the product or service of our workplace, it is the culture and texture and ways of creating community. Our task is to create organizations we believe in and to do it as

⁶ Block, “Stewardship,” p. 9



an offering, not a demand.” Finally, he says, “the antidote to self-interest is to commit and to find cause. To commit to something outside of ourselves.”⁷ That is exactly what each of us must do as individuals. These are the kinds of organizations we need, the kind of Air Force we know will endure and the kind of Joint team America can be proud of.

I look forward to hearing from you and answering questions you may have. Thank you for your service, in uniform or out, and for allowing me to join you today. Thank you for allowing me to ramble on about something I have come to believe is fundamental to leadership of my Service and, I believe, of all those who serve. Thank you.

⁷ Block, “Stewardship,” p. 10